



# The League of Women Voters of Virginia

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## **Governor Mark Warner declines to participate in televised U.S. Senate debate**

The League of Women Voters of Virginia [LWV-VA] regrets to announce that it will not be able to sponsor a debate this fall between the two major candidates for the U.S. Senate seat from Virginia because it could not secure a commitment from one of the candidates.

LWV-VA President Olga Hernandez said former governor Mark Warner, the Democratic candidate, had notified the League that he would not participate in a televised debate sponsored by the League. Former governor James Gilmore, the Republican candidate, had previously said he was willing to participate.

The League had invited both candidates to participate in a debate to be produced in conjunction with WTVR a CBS station and WCVE a PBS station. The debate would have been the only joint event where all Virginians could view the candidates on free television. Both WTVR and WCVE were to make the broadcast available to all commercial and public television and radio affiliates statewide as it did in the 2006 Senate debate.

"We're very disappointed that we could not get both major senatorial candidates to agree to participate in a debate this year," Hernandez said. "We believe that televised debates are one of the most effective ways for voters to learn about the candidates and their positions." Peter Maroney, Vice President and General Manager of WTVR and John Felton, Vice President and General Manager of Program and Production of WCVE likewise expressed their regret. "Exposing voters to a rigorous debate of the critical issues facing this nation today is a cornerstone of the democratic election process in America," said Maroney. "It is regrettable that former Governor Warner has chosen to deny Virginians that opportunity by declining this statewide broadcast opportunity."

The League of Women Voters of Virginia has a history of sponsoring televised debates among major candidates for statewide office in Virginia. In 2006, we sponsored the U.S. Senate debate between then Senator Allen and current Senator Webb. The televised feed was broadcast statewide and on CSPAN to help voters decide their choice

Hernandez said that the League issued the invitation in June when the candidates were certified and had asked the candidates to respond by August 25. We felt that was adequate time to plan the debate with its sponsoring partners. She said that Governor Warner's campaign notified the organization that they would only participate in two debates both of which are closed to the public and /or require a large fee to be in the audience.

*The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages. With more than 88 years of experience the League is one of America's most trusted grassroots organizations*